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Saskatchewan
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Farm & Food Report

Communications Branch, Walter Scott Building
3085 Albert Street, Regina, Canada, S4S 0B1

Saskatchewan

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CONSISTENCY IS FIRST PRIORITY FOR NEW VIDO DIRECTOR

Continuing an outstanding track record of research and development of new vaccines for both animal and human diseases is the goal of Dr. Andrew Potter, the newly appointed Director of the Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization (VIDO) at the University of Saskatchewan.

Potter was appointed to replace Lorne Babiuk, who has accepted the position of Vice President of Research at the University of Alberta.

Dr. Potter has been a member of the VIDO team for 22 years.

"It's certainly an honour to be chosen for the position," he said. "It's a bit of a change for me, but former director Lorne Babiuk really has established such a team culture that it makes for an easier transition."

In announcing Potter's appointment, U of S Vice President of Research Steven Franklin stated, "With the growing threat of emerging diseases in both animals and humans, the U of S is extremely fortunate to have someone of Dr. Potter's calibre to lead VIDO, and soon InterVac, as these world-class labs assume an increasingly important role in the development of Canada's national infectious disease-fighting strategies."

InterVac is the new $100 million International Vaccine Centre now being built at the university.

In assuming the new position, Potter says he will be seeking to maintain the tradition of excellence at VIDO.

"I think all of us have bought into the vision for VIDO's future and where we've been in the past, and I believe continuity is what it's all about now," Potter said. "In terms of the research we do, I think we're on track, and with InterVac coming on stream three years down the road, we're really building towards that."

Potter is highly respected for his previous work on animal diseases. His research is said to have generated world-firsts in disease prevention, and more than 40 patents for animal vaccine developments and therapeutics. He was the first scientist to develop a licensed animal vaccine through the use of biotechnology.

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Potter says the progress on animal diseases has been remarkable. "It's the switch over to some of the chronic diseases that really excites us," he said. "On BSE specifically, and some of the work on CWD (Chronic Wasting Disease), we have seen phenomenal progress over the last six to eight months."

Recently, Potter has overseen new research on the application of genomics to the animal health field, as well as the forging of links between the animal and human infectious disease research communities to ensure that technologies common to both fields can be used.

The massive InterVac laboratory building is a bio-secure facility that will allow advanced study of some of humanity's greatest disease threats, including pandemic influenza, West Nile Virus and tuberculosis.

"The funding for InterVac is all in place now," Potter said. "We actually have our first employee, the bio-safety officer. We are looking at a ground-breaking in late June, with a scheduled completion date around January of 2010."

In the meantime, Potter expresses confidence in the VIDO staff.

"VIDO is only as good as the people who work here, and we have just an incredible group of 142 people," he stated.

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SASKATOON SEMINAR TO ADDRESS NEW RULES FOR SRM DISPOSAL

Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food (SAF) has organized a seminar for the various cattle industry stakeholders that are affected by new disposal regulations for Specified Risk Materials announced by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA).

The new limitations come into effect July 12, and deal with the handling, transportation and disposal of a list of materials, including skull, brain, trigeminal ganglia, eyes, tonsils, spinal cord and dorsal root ganglia of cattle over 30 months of age, plus the distal ileum from cattle of all ages.

The new controls are aimed at preventing any of these materials from being used in livestock feed, pet food or fertilizers, as part of the overall, goal to eradicate BSE from the Canadian cattle herd.

Wendi Dehod, Environmental Engineer in the SAF Livestock Development Branch, says the seminar should be useful for a wide range of industry players.

"We're hoping this seminar will address the concerns and some of the information requests being put forward to the department from both the slaughter and processing industry here in Saskatchewan, as well as large livestock operations such as feedlots and larger cow-calf operations," she stated.

Registration for the seminar is open to all interested parties. "Anyone who is going to be dealing with Specified Risk Material is welcome," Dehod added. "It could be anyone from a local landfill operator to someone thinking of being a regional solution provider."

While the agenda includes a review of the new regulations by CFIA, the emphasis will be on discussing the various solutions that are available for destruction or containment of SRM.

"We have invited technology providers from incineration companies to in-vessel composters to speak, as well as gasification companies and those who employ processes such as anaerobic digestion," Dehod said. "We also have Sask Power on the agenda to talk about independent power generation."

SAF is similarly opening the door to companies that are offering new disposal solutions to the industry.

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"Although we've made some invitations to some specific disposal companies, it's only because we have had contact with them in the past," Dehod noted. "If there is anyone who has a technology they would like to debut or present information on, we're willing to hear from them."

The seminar will be held June 19 from 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the Travelodge Hotel in Saskatoon. Registration forms can be obtained by calling Debbie Meriam at (306) 933-5992, and may be returned by fax or mail before June 12.

There is no charge for the seminar and it is open to the public.

Dehod says the information at the seminar is timely.

"We need to prepare our industries and place some technology on the ground to make sure that Saskatchewan is ready" she stated.

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SUNFLOWER SESSION EXPLORES FUTURE OF INDUSTRY

Sunflowers will be in the spotlight at an upcoming event.

The day-long information session and tour will be held June 27 at the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada Experimental Farm in Saskatoon.

Ray McVicar with Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food says the session is targeted to both producers who grow sunflowers already and those who are interested in adding sunflowers to their crop rotation.

The recent Census of Agriculture indicates there were 15,800 acres of sunflower grown in Saskatchewan in 2006, and McVicar feels the crop has a lot of potential.

"It has been a crop that has regularly provided a good economic return, and it is a broad leaf crop that could fit well into rotations with cereal crops," he stated.

McVicar says building local markets for sunflowers would help boost the acreage.

"We have a few good sunflower processors and buyers in the province, but we need additional markets and uses. Much of the product has to be shipped out of province, so freight costs are a factor holding back the crop," he noted.

That is one of the issues the information session will get into, with discussion about new uses and new varieties to drive the future of the sunflower industry in Saskatchewan.

"There will be a presentation on potential new uses for sunflower, such as livestock feed, bio-diesel and other possible applications. Then we will also have a chance to look at the variety trials and the research plots that are going on at the Agriculture Canada Research Station at Saskatoon," McVicar said.

The free session is hosted by the Saskatchewan Sunflower Committee and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, and sponsored by NuFarm Canada.

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It runs from 10:45 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., and also includes a tour of the University of Saskatchewan's College of Engineering Laboratory to look at processing research.

Anyone interested in attending should pre-register by June 22 by contacting Ray McVicar by phone at (306) 787-4665 or e-mail at rmcvicar@agr.gov.sk.ca.

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BLUE-GREEN ALGAE BLOOMS MAY BE TOXIC TO CATTLE

The spring runoff from melting snow recharges dugouts and other surface water bodies with much needed water, while at the same time bringing nutrients to the soil. With the warm weather of summer, these soil nutrients can act as the perfect food for algae growth.

The appearance of algae on surface waters such as dugouts, dams, sloughs, and lakes should be treated by livestock producers as an indicator that conditions may be right for the growth of potentially toxic blue-green algae, also known as Cyanobacteria.

"Cyanobacteria are capable of producing toxins, which in high concentrations can actually kill livestock and companion animals," warned Bob Klemmer, a Beef-Forage Specialist with Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food.

"Commonly called blue-green algae, these organisms are quite often mistaken for true algae. However, they are, in fact, a type of bacteria called Cyanobacteria."

Several factors increase the risk of toxic blooms to livestock. In addition to spring run-off or heavy summer rains, which wash soil nutrients into surface water bodies, direct watering of livestock introduces nutrients from urine and feces into the drinking area. Extended periods of hot weather increase the temperature of nutrient-rich surface waters during summer. As well, if blue-green algae is present, wind can cause the bloom to concentrate on one side of the water body.

"The combination of readily available nutrients and warm weather provides the optimum conditions for both algae and Cyanobacteria growth," Klemmer explained.

"When Cyanobacteria are predominant, there is a higher degree of risk for livestock. Many animal deaths that occur each year are due to toxins released from the Cyanobacteria when the bloom dies off."

But Klemmer says there are several management practices which can reduce the risk of algae and Cyanobacteria growth.

"Installing remote watering systems and restricting livestock from direct access to the body of water is one method of prevention," he stated. "Properly designed aeration systems can also reduce the levels of nutrients available for algae and Cyanobacteria growth."

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Producers are able to find more information on the appropriate sizing and design of aeration systems through the water quality publication website maintained by the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration (PFRA) at www.agr.gc.ca/pfra/water/quality_e.htm.

Planting forage buffer strips along water runs and around dugouts, streams, sloughs, and dams will help to reduce the amount of soil nutrients entering these water bodies and helps to clarify the water.

Producers are encouraged to monitor algae and Cyanobacteria growth, and to be prepared with alternate fresh water sources during times of higher risk.

However, Klemmer says that the best approach to reducing the risk of Cyanobacteria poisoning is to learn how to recognize it. Cyanobacteria, unlike true algae, are single celled organisms, and do not typically stick together. "Using this habit of growth, producers are able to identify Cyanobacteria by running their hand with fingers slightly open through the bloom," he stated.

"Cyanobacteria will largely flow through their fingers, or individually stick, whereas algae will clump together and not flow through." Be sure to wash your hands with soap and water after doing this.

Klemmer points out that some Cyanobacteria will also form a thick, pea-soup-like appearance, while others look like a shimmering blue-green sheen across the surface of the water.

Algae and Cyanobacteria blooms cause off tastes and smells in water bodies, as well. This side effect may cause a reduction in livestock water intake and poor cattle performance.

There are several treatment products containing copper sulfate that can be used to control algae and Cyanobacteria blooms in dugouts and smaller water bodies. The PFRA fact sheet "Copper Treatments for Dugouts" lists the products available, the amounts of product necessary for given water volumes, and the methods of treatment. This fact sheet can be found at www.agr.gc.ca/pfra/water/copper_e.htm.

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MOOSE JAW HOSTS ANNUAL HOMETOWN FAIR AND HORSE SHOW

The time has come to once again discover the fun, food and magic of the Moose Jaw Hometown Fair and Horse Show. The 124th annual fair will be held from June 22 to 24 this year, on the fair grounds in Moose Jaw.

"The Moose Jaw Hometown Fair and Horse Show has been around since 1873," stated Glen Louis, General Manager of the Moose Jaw Exhibition Company Ltd. "The fair started back in the 1800s as an agriculture society event and then progressed. As time went on, entertainment and amusement rides were added."

This year's theme is "Saluting 90 years of 4-H" to represent the partnership the fair has built with the 4-H organization over its many years. Organizers continue to partner with the 4-H club, which holds its annual beef show and sale in conjunction with the event.

"As usual, we have a little taste of everything this year," Louis said. "We have the original miniature to light and heavy horse shows, and this year we have added a couple of different events."

A colt-breaking demonstration will be put on by Garry Hunt, a very well known and reputable expert in this field from Calgary. He will be demonstrating how to break a colt that has never been halter-broken or ridden before. The presentation will take place in a five-hour timeframe over a three-day period. By the final day, Hunt says the horse will be broken. More information on his work is available on the website at www.breakingcolts.com.

"Other attractions include a llama show and cattle shows," Louis added. "The livestock events recognize the best in the agricultural backbone of our community."

A number of different main stage shows will also be taking place. They include a MuchMusic Video Dance Party and a singing competition entitled "Moose Jaw Idol."

Louis highlighted other unique demonstrations that will be featured as part of the fair. "Rick Mahone, a chainsaw carver, will perform a fascinating show through the weekend, cutting designs into 10-inch round logs. As well, the West Coast Lumberjack Show features a repertoire of lumberjack-type activities that are very exciting to watch. It's definitely something you don't see everyday in Saskatchewan!"

(more)

The fair will also explore old-fashioned pleasures through its "Lifestyles" displays, including the best in baking, canning, sewing, photography and handicrafts. As a tribute to seniors, a Seniors' Tea will be held Friday afternoon, as well.

"The intent of the fair is to provide education and entertainment to area citizens of all ages. Everybody has an opportunity to participate and enjoy the event. People are encouraged to come down and take in the rural flavour," Louis said.

More information on the Moose Jaw Hometown Fair and Horse Show can be found by accessing the Moose Jaw Exhibition Company's website at www.moosejawex.com, or by e-mailing moosejawexh@sasktel.net.

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